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News Release

3 of 4 Utah Drivers Admit Using Cell Phones When Driving

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Nearly three-fourths of all Utah adult drivers (74%) and half of high school students who drive (51%) admit they talk on a cell phone daily while behind the wheel. One-quarter of Utah adult drivers and 53% of teens report they text and drive daily, according to new data released by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH).

“Many have speculated that a majority of drivers use a cell phone while driving and now we have data to show just how serious the problem really is,” said Kevin Condra, UDOH Unintentional Injury Coordinator. “Talking or texting on a cell phone while driving is extremely dangerous and can have life-long consequences.”

According to the Utah Highway Safety Office, in 2008, cell phones were the leading cause of driver distraction, resulting in 882 crashes where the driver was known to be on a cell phone or texting.

Troy and Marielle Jordan of Draper know the heartbreak that happens when drivers text behind the wheel. Their 18-year-old son Xander was killed in 2008 after he lost control of his car in poor weather conditions.

“My prayer is that we can eliminate the loss of life from the avoidable,” said Troy Jordan. “Teaching ourselves and our kids to eliminate cell phone usage while driving would help our world to be a better place and keep our youth here as long as we can.”

Effective July 1, 2009, House Bill 290 prohibits all Utah drivers from text messaging while driving and provides harsh penalties for violating the law. However, UDOH data show the law may not be working, as 26 percent of adult drivers admit to texting and driving, while only 23 percent did before the law was passed.

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“People need to realize that this law applies to all drivers and not just teens. It’s illegal for anyone to text and drive in Utah,” said Representative Stephen Clark, chief sponsor of HB 290. “It’s going to take a strong investment in education about the dangers of this practice and the stiff penalties that are tied to crashes caused by texting while driving to get people to finally just hang up and drive.”

UDOH data also show:

- Younger adults (18-34 years) are more likely to text and drive than any other age group (40%).
- Adult drivers ages 35-49 reported the highest percentage of talking on a cell phone while driving among all age groups (83%). This was true for both male and female drivers.
- Males are more likely to text and drive compared to females (31% vs. 18%) for all ages.
- Adult drivers with a college education reported the highest percentage of talking on a cell phone while driving (78%) while drivers with less than a high school education reported the lowest percentage of talking on a cell phone while driving (53%).
- Adult drivers with household income levels greater than \$50,000 reported the highest percentage of talking on a cell phone while driving (85%). These drivers also reported the highest percentage of texting while driving (28%).
- Adult drivers with household income levels below \$20,000 reported the lowest percentage of talking on a cell phone while driving (45%).
- Adult drivers in rural areas reported a higher percentage of talking on a cell phone (75% vs. 69%) and texting (26% vs. 21%) while driving than drivers in urban areas.

The data were collected through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) Surveys. The BRFSS is an annual, telephone-based survey conducted among Utah adults ages 18 and older. The YRBSS is a school-based survey administered to students in grades 9-12 every two years.

For more information on statewide efforts to educate drivers about safe driving, visit the Zero Fatalities campaign website at <http://ut.zerofatalities.com/>.

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